

WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

SOME SPIRITUAL VALUES OF THE CRISIS

(AUGUST 1915)

"Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh—and also the night." Isa. xxi. 11–12.

"For it is a day of trouble and of treading down, of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision, of breaking down walls, and of crying to the mountains." Isa. xxii. 6.

The war is too much with us to make desirable here any dwelling upon its external and secular aspects. Enough of those elsewhere. These pages, intended only for mystics, shall turn from them and endeavour to lead rather towards still waters and pastures of peace.

But of inward peace, let us remember, there is an illusory as well as a true kind. There is a peace which is but an evasion of stormy circumstances, a mere contrivance for escaping them and regaining our former ease of mind. The peace of strong souls comes not from shirking strife and pain; it is incident to and dependent upon them, is forged and wrested out of seeming evil itself. At the heart of every storm—whether the storm be in or without ourselves, or in and without us at the same moment—is a still centre, to reach which involves no evasion, no fear, no shrinking from the surface-condition of things, however roughened and terrifying, but such a steadfast gaze into them as enables us to treat them at their own value and to control them by generating from them a centre of stability and peace for ourselves. So Job found God in the whirlwind and peace in himself. But before such mastery of winds and waves becomes possible to

us, there is the prior stage of experience that seeks peace in some external refuge rather than creates it within oneself. "O for the wings of a dove; then would I fly away and be at rest"; "Hide me beneath the shadow of Thy wings until this tyranny be overpast";—we all know and have uttered these natural heart-cries, these appeals for truce and respite from the storm. Yet they are utterances of frailty rather than of strength, voices of that weakness from which true courage of soul becomes perfected in those who shrink not. The Greek dramatists caught the trick of them, and at moments of most poignant pain in their tragic problems offered anodyne of that kind to the overwrought mind of their audiences.

Could I take me to some cavern for mine hiding,
In the hilltops where the Sun scarce hath trod,
Or a cloud make the home of mine abiding
As a bird among the bird-droves of God! . . .
To the strand of the Daughters of the Sunset,
The Apple-tree, the singing, and the gold . . .
Where a voice of living waters never ceaseth
In God's quiet garden by the sea,
And Earth, the ancient life-giver, increaseth
Joy among the meadows, like a tree.¹

Beautiful exceedingly this Greek vision of Eden and the Tree of Life in the midst thereof bearing the golden apples of peace and immortality; and the heart, touched by the tears of mortal things, is weakly prone to lull itself into the transient security of such imaginings rather than press unflinchingly on, endure to the end, and be saved indeed by becoming an Eden itself. But a spirit aspiring to be strong and of good courage—and it cannot know strength without first learning all weakness—disdains temporary soporifics and will not suffer itself to be side-tracked in imaginary havens of refuge. Rather will it wrestle with the angel of the storm, the earthquake, the fire, crying "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me"; will seek to pluck out the heart of their mystery and make them yield up the secret of the still small voice speaking in the silence of

¹ Euripides, *Hippolytus*, Murray's translation.

their centre. Through knowing many tears it will reach the stage when tears are permanently dried and impossible for it, and when it can behold unblenched, yet with infinite tenderness, the painfulest spectacles, and, by virtue of a wise and comprehending love, interpret problems and paradoxes inexplicable to understandings less developed.

The "tender shoot" of such a spirit is present in the feeblest of us. Life in the "dry ground" of physical conditions entailing inevitable trials and strife—especially stressful times like the present—is its forcing-ground; the mill in which our latent gold is crushed from the ore of our natural part and refined for great uses in the world of Super-nature to which it belongs and for which it is being gradually adapted. In but few has its presence yet so manifested as to be known as a priceless possession and asset, let alone grown to a stature enabling us to look with serene front upon such chaos and spectacles of evil and misery as in these days oppress us. Enslaved by sense-claims, ignorant, and often unwishful to be otherwise, of anything beyond them, we have failed to develop a faculty the use of which in these days of universal testing would have stilled many apprehensive minds, resolved many anxieties, interpreted to us the inwardness of this crisis, and facilitated the liberation of that volume of spiritual energy, which, working upon its own plane, would have helped to sever the roots of physical force and bring the war to an automatic and speedier end. The faculty is that of "watching." But who ever hears anything of what "watching" implies? Popular religious teaching, always materialistic and averse to anything introspective, knows and can say nothing of this psychological function and its value, although no injunction was oftener upon the lips of its Master than "Watch ye!" or accompanied by plainer warnings of what would occur to the unvigilant and what would become manifest to the watchful.¹

¹ See Matt. xxiv. 42-3; Rev. iii. 3 and xvi. 15; and 1 Thess. v. 1-8. Spiritual unwatchfulness has had its inevitable counterpart in political apathy and national unpreparedness. None of the allied nations

The psychology of both Eastern religion and our own Scriptures recognises this faculty. Both describe it by the same title, "the Watcher," "the Watchman." It is that inward eye or intellectually-visualising faculty characterising our higher and unmanifested part. It dwells as it were in a tower, overlooking the grosser, mortal part of us which is built like protective walls and battlements around the central citadel of our peace. Remember the Psalmist's mystical directions: "Go round Zion; consider her *palaces*; mark well her *bulwarks*; and tell the *towers* thereof; tell it (explain this symbolism of man's outward and concealed nature) to the generation following." Our watchman is ordained to keep sentinel from his height in the timeless part of us, to warn us of approaching peril, and to interpret the signs of our personal times. Seeing and knowing beyond the limited horizon of our workaday objective mind, he it is who, in all ages, watches over the mystic Israel and slumbers not nor sleeps. "I have set watchmen upon thy walls which shall never hold their peace day nor night"; "I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime and am set in my ward whole nights" (Isa. lxii. 6, and xii. 8). Cultivation of the life of the spirit and constant immersion of the mind in it accentuate his presence in us and his powers, render us increasingly sensitive to his monitions, which become reliable motives of action and judgment, and beget wisdom and seership; whereas exclusive attention to things of sense shuts off all awareness of his presence and leaves our intelligence irresponsive to his intimations. "Except the Lord keep the city"—unless our mentality is kept in sensitive touch with its root in the plane of spirit—"the watchman waketh but in vain."

Therefore to "watching" as paramount importance is attached by the Scriptures as to praying. It implies, of course, something quite different from psychic visioning and far more than using acute intellectual observation. It involves the use of the latter power in concert with the inward faculty; the practice of a expected or was prepared for war, which broke suddenly like a thief in the night.

meditational process by which the sense-perceptions of the outward-looking mind are carried inward to the cogniser in our "tower," who thereupon transposes them into their spiritual values and correspondences, and gives us back a just, and not a partial and illusory, consciousness of their purport. Watching, therefore, brings vision, seership, and ensures the poise and stability of mind that come with all clear-seeing; "where there is no vision"—and it has long been lost to us—"the people perisheth." It braces together and co-ordinates the lower and higher parts of the mind, and so promotes the formation within us of that "rock" or true substantiality of being upon which can be built a "church" or sanctuary of the Divine Spirit. The watchman has been given many names—*daimon*, genius, guardian, higher self, and one more expressive than them all, "the angel which always beholds the face of the Father"; beholds it, not only because, however our lower mind may be engaged, he stands perpetually upon the divine plane watching the face and workings of the Father, but because those who in this world aspire to watch he enables to behold that face in every phase of Nature, in every temporal event, in every human form. Difficult, of course, the unwatchful find it to see that face in the events of to-day, events calculated, perhaps, to make the world cultivate the practice of watching in the future; but to the watchful belong that quiet eye and heart that see complexities becoming resolved into simplicity, order shaping the disorder, good issuing from evil, and the wrath of man inuring to the praise of God.

"Watchman, what of the night?" then;—what of this present darkness we are passing through? And the answer comes in a riddle, "The morning cometh,—and also the night." For the watchman's synthetic spiritual vision sees not separate things and discrete processes as does the objective analytic mind; he beholds the synchronous interknit relationships of them all. Therefore he cannot reduce his comprehensive perceptions into sequential narrative. Moreover, from his watch-tower are perceived things in-

expedient to be retailed to the general ear, which would but resent, misunderstand, and be alarmed by them,—and, as usual, turn and stone the prophet. Only certain deductions and broad generalisations can he state. He sees and declares how, in the moral progress and spiritual development of the race, morning succeeds night and night follows morning in correspondence with the diurnal rhythm of solar light and darkness, yet, unlike that phenomenon (for Nature has no power to *raise* herself, but remains upon one uniform level of attainment), upon an ever-ascending spiral of progress. Always, as in the scriptural record of our genesis, “the evening and the morning” go to the making of each complete creative “day”; evening always coming first, for in all that darkness connotes—whether intellectual or moral, or war and strife in any form—are contained those elements by whose very antagonism and friction is generated the heat that ultimately bursts forth into morning-light; whilst the place of transition from one to the other, the flash-point at which darkness breaks into flame and light, is that which is ever marked by the cosmic sign of the Son of Man—the Cross, with its twin sides of anguish to the “children of the night” (to use St Paul’s terms) and consolation to “children of the day.”

The quickening of racial consciousness now for some years in process and betokening the dawn of one of these periodic “days” in our evolution, must needs be attended with convulsions terrifying to those unprepared for the transition, but natural and expected for the watchful. A transformation involving a general “renewal of our minds,” a judging of the quick and the dead elements in all our ideals and institutions—which is what is now in process—how could it come about without a cataclysm? How could new wine be poured into old bottles without bursting them, or our collective mentality be keyed up to the higher pitch which the access of a new quality of light involves, unless the tenebrous contents already present therein be first expelled and dissipated? Purgation was inevitable. The villainies, the horrors, the outrages and

devilish ingenuities exhibited during the war are but the liberated, manifested thought we have been harbouring and nourishing in secret during many previous years of peace. As has never happened before, and as though our whole inner self were disgorging its accumulated poison, Earth, Air, Water, Fire—the four traditional metaphysical elements of our nature—are each contributing to the conflict the visible symbols of our subjective content, in the form of engines of destruction employed in the corresponding elements of outward Nature. The overt infamies of warfare are now seen to be but the concealed infamies of peacetime given unbridled scope and expression. However honourably, as the world’s standard goes, we may desire to conduct our warfare, there is seen to be no honour, and nothing but vileness, about it; yet it has to be worked through and its lessons learned so that we may avoid its recurrence. Craft upon one side is met by greater craft upon the other. This form of cunning or inhumane treatment, that diabolic contrivance, is countered and outbid by the opponents in reprisals of increasing malice, and the struggle proceeds in one vicious circle of intensifying evil, of any end of which one would despair without the certitude that out of that evil the new good is being born and out of the strain of antagonism the light of a new morning will be kindled. In view of it all the position is as though the question the world has been asked to consider these many centuries and has failed to answer, “What think ye of Christ; whose son is He?” has been temporarily withdrawn and another substituted to hasten us in making up our minds about it,—What think ye of *man*, whose son is *he*? that he is capable of these iniquities. By observing his own fruits he may come to realise from what stock he springs and desire to be transgrafted to a nobler tree. By seeing exposed the contents of his own heart he may experience such self-disgust as will create a desire for some purer content to come in and fill him. Meanwhile, whilst thus revealing himself to himself, he is helping on his own salvation—though he has not humour enough to

see the irony of it—by divesting himself of his worldly wealth and blowing it away in gunfire at the rate of millions of pounds a day,—a novel form of ritual for banishing the spirit of Mammon he has so long served. The hecatombs of souls he deprives of physical bodies that the surviving residue may keep or increase its grasp upon temporalities are happily beyond his power to destroy and only pass from the tragi-comedy of this terrestrial puppet-house to more real being in another chamber of the house of life. "Grieve not for them who die, for all these are but phantom forms, moulded upon that One Real that is Myself, unborn, undying, that neither slays nor is slain." And yet the grief we needs must feel, and would be unworthy not to feel, is, in the economy of Wisdom, being utilised to lift us beyond the touch of grief. The spectacle and burden of suffering become so intense that the mind is driven to devise fresh means of adjusting itself to the intolerable, and the travail of so doing gives birth to a wider range of consciousness and new extensions of spiritual faculty.

"Recent events have clearly shown, even to the most phlegmatic, that we are, in a perfectly real sense, up against the Devil incarnate."¹ This recent widely published episcopal utterance is perfectly true. But how significant that this perception of a mystical fact should come from quarters hitherto themselves "most phlegmatic" and impervious to anything mystical! When, under stress of the terrors of these times, official Christianity is thus driven to recognising the fact of the mystical incarnation of Antichrist, it is perhaps not now far from realising the converse truth it has been so slow to learn—that of the incarnation "in a perfectly real sense" of the living Christ in the body corporate of man. *That* too is a truth which in this "day of breaking down walls" our moribund theology is now "up against" and that will become more and more patent as things develop and Antichrist is driven out of us by the forces arrayed against it.

For among the precipitating causes of the present

¹ Bishop of Pretoria in *The Times*, 25th May 1915.

crisis is one, observed by the "watchman" but otherwise overlooked, that has more largely contributed to "bringing a sword" among us than any other, although by superficial thought it would be deemed more likely to have ensured us peace than a sword. I refer to the closer drawing into this world's atmosphere of the Christ-Spirit as the result of widespread earnest aspiration during recent years for betterment of the unwholesome conditions—social, ethical, political, spiritual—amid which we have long been living, and against the thralldom of which innumerable hearts and minds have been raised in active protest or secret disgust and rebellion. It matters not whether that protest has gone up to the doors of heaven as conscious prayer for relief, as definitely formulated petition for an accession of spiritual power and quickening grace into this fetid world, for any improvement of which many, like Newman, have seen no hope save from some new divine revelation; or whether it has been expressed—as often it has been, without active belief in or reliance upon the possibility of superior intervention—merely in selfless practical activity towards amelioration, passionate devotion to higher social ideals, or sublime self-sacrifice in the cause of human interests. There are many ways of praying. The unselfish aspirations and labours of many an idealist and warm-hearted sympathiser with his kind, of many an Abou ben Adhem who has not known God but loved his fellow-men, have proved more fruitful prayer than the perfunctory litanies of those who have aimed at maintaining tradition and vested interests and incidentally securing a good time for *themselves*. Nor has it mattered that these aspirations have often been expressed in unconventional ways, or in forms seemingly subversive of religion and contrary to common ideas about prayer. For religion, too, has as many ways of expression as there are men, and it is not *our* approval, but the judgment of the Reader of hearts that determines the religious value even of the apparently irreligious. We have reached a time, and have lived through and lived down many obstacles to reach it, when the religious instinct has

outgrown and can no longer be compelled into conformity with any prescribed pattern, tradition, or convention; when the sincerity and intellectual honesty of the rationalist, the shafts of the satirist of false values, the fervour of the iconoclast and so-called atheist, have often constituted far truer religious factors than the official temples. "Ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men *ought* to worship. The hour cometh when neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem ye shall worship the Father." Take a notorious example. The man who claimed to have killed God, who assumed the title "The Crucified One," and asserted that his mission was to succeed Christ by reversing His work and neutralising the gospel of weakness and "slave-morality" with which His doctrine had inoculated the race as with a poison, who held that the moral law is not, that its assumption paralyses true life, and that ruthlessness and cruelty are the noblest passions for the soul in quest of larger being and richer beauty than are now possible to it,—the strenuous and much misunderstood idealist, Nietzsche. Yes, let *him*, although denounced by the timid and the complacent for disturbing the deadly spiritual conditions of our age and helping to fan the passions of his countrymen into war and unbridled lust, be numbered among the great prayer-lifters of our time. Over the froth of his lips—it shocks many, but the prattle of a lusty child need not be called blasphemy—the Recording Angel will not waste a stroke of his pencil. What will go to his credit in the Judgment-books are the sincerity of his revolt against the hollowness of modern civilisation and the falseness of its beliefs and ideals, the blazing passion of his love for the good, the true, the really strong and beautiful, as against the shams, inanities, and putridities of our social and moral condition. Nietzsche had vision, and was not disobedient to what he saw upon turning his revolted eyes away from things as they are in search of something fairer; had his eyes been cleansed he might have beheld the perfect pattern visible upon the Mount rather than what alone was possible to him—a travesty of that pattern, distorted and blurred by

intervening fog, yet in which outlines of the perfect one are still discernible.

Now all these multiform prayers for a new heaven and a new earth, all these abounding heart-cries which, these years past, have been rising like a fountain night and day for alleviation from the tyranny of Dives and the sores and sorrows of the social Lazarus-life at our gates, all these formulations of some Ideal worth struggling for and dimly felt to be realisable, have not been without result, have not been wasted, ineffectual energy. On the contrary, they have had an effect, a compelling effect, upon that plane of life to which all true prayer travels; and the present universal break-up is, strange as to some it may appear, an answer to those prayers. The position is, upon a cosmic scale, that which is recorded in miniature in the simple, pregnant incident which once occurred to certain disciples who walked upon the Emmaus-road. They had encountered on their path an unrecognised Stranger, whose talk so caused their hearts to burn that when night fell upon them and they could go no further,—although the Stranger made as if *he* had further to travel before his task was finished—they importuned him into their house and offered him of their bread, in the breaking of which the Stranger's identity became revealed.

It is not now to a couple of bewildered men that that episode is being re-enacted. To-day, and of recent years, numberless thousands of pilgrims have been walking the road of life, perplexed in the extreme by the problems that that life presents, but faintly conscious of a strange and quickening Presence in their midst that warmed their courage and cheered them on through the deepening dusk. And it being "towards evening and the day (of this dispensation of things) far spent," and the tangles of the time growing so increasingly complex and oppressive that it was impossible for things to go further without a crisis, as it were a great insistent cry has gone up, desiring the Stranger's more intimate acquaintance, and pressing for His closer association with human life and affairs.

We have "*constrained* Him, saying *Abide* with us." And the Stranger has taken us at our word; He has responded, and has come in.

Now, as has been stated earlier, when into the house and heart of any man, or of men collectively, the Christ-Power is constrained to come and *abide* (He may have passed through many times uninvited and without abiding), consequences must needs ensue; changes will arise within the fabric of our organism; disturbances will occur that will be felt, and felt acutely. "Who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire, and shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." The new light will be discerned as the reverse of light, and will set in violent commotion the denizens of our own darkness; the advent of peace will be felt as the coming of a sword. But of His incoming and abiding there will be one certain and unmistakable token,—He will be "known by the breaking of bread." Not, this time, the Bread which is His own Body; but rather the bread which is *ourselves*; the bread, good or bad as it may be, of our natural being, the sum-total of our worth at the moment—that is the bread in the breaking of which into fragments He will be known. His own Body, we know, is perpetually broken and given us as food. But to that perpetual Eucharist there is a converse, a reciprocated one, we seldom think of, which is celebrated when *our* bread is offered to *Him*. We overlook that God longs to be fed as well as we; that, complementarily to our hunger for the Divine flesh, there is a Divine famishment for ours. "I would eat" is His word, as well as "I would be eaten"; "I was an hungered and ye fed *Me*."

Poor enough may be the bread we have to offer, but that seems not to matter. Such as it is He takes and breaks it, dining preferably with any publican or sinner. Look round to-day, then, and behold the broken bread. See it not only upon the military battle-front, but throughout that larger war-area shaken by this conflict, comprising every home, every social and economic

institution, every human being now caused to suffer in mind, body, or estate by this searching, shattering crisis. Broken bodies and broken hearts; broken homes and broken fortunes; broken churches and broken political systems, and much that has yet to be broken. Among friend or foe, from the shattered nation, the devastated land, to the wounded soldier limping in the street, wherever the war has set its mark, to whatever heart it has sent a pang, *there* is the token of the Refiner's presence, there the sign-manual of Him whom we have constrained to come in and abide with us. He is known by the breaking of that bread.

And now to revert to the point from which these reflections started.

"*Know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*"

But since for so many the breaking-up of their house is now befalling, there are needed strong souls to serve as supports for them and as foundations and pillars for the new house and new order of things that will arise upon the site of the old; souls that amid the fury of the storm can "*stand still*" and see the salvation of God" emerging from it, and that, amid unsettlement, panic, and frenzied "*crying to the mountains,*" can remain unmoved and "*serve Him with a quiet mind.*" In the centre of this storm is stillness absolute; quietude more perfect than these summer nights; it is at the circumference only that rage the unruly elements and passions not yet leashed into balance and harmony. If Nature—that great mystic—takes no notice of the war, why should we, whose higher part belongs to a realm to which she cannot reach and is capable of experiencing a peace greater than she can ever know? Let us harness, then, the unruly mental and emotional elements in ourselves, controlling and indrawing them into our own centre, so that what otherwise would be diffused and wasted force may become consolidated and stable,—a house that *cannot* be broken up. It needs, of course, effort and will, not a leaving of our

minds merely void, indifferent, or careless. The Divine word is "I *make* peace" (Isa. xlv. 7), and it is for us to say and do likewise. Our inward peace must be *made*; as children of the Creator we are given the privilege and power of creating it ourselves, and so of emulating the Father in this respect; wherefore it is written, "Blessed are all peace-makers; they shall be called children of God." It will not be made by frittering away mental and emotional energy in anxiety as to how outward events are going, how long the war will last, how one's personal safety and belongings are likely to be affected; nor by indulging in constant war-chatter, news-reading, and rushing about for the latest intelligence. Such habits are dissipative, not constructive. Each repetition of them roughens our mental sea; each abstention helps to ensure "still waters." They but inflame the storm in oneself and aggravate it in others. The peace-maker stills himself within and without, and unconsciously sheds the influence of his own peace upon his disquiet neighbours. "Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is *stayed on Thee*,"—not on the contents of the daily paper.

It is in peace thus made, then, that at such a juncture as this one can best serve God and man. In that peace it is that one watches and that one perceives things not otherwise perceptible; no—not *things*, but that which goes on at the back of the shadow-play we imagine to be solid "things" and causes them to manifest.

Again then, "Watchman, what of the night?" In the night—such a night as the present time—a thief was to come. Yes, that Thief from heaven who once hung between thieves of earth, and is still ever found in their midst; that Thief who is to-day breaking into, and breaking up, many houses, but who may be counted on to steal from us only that which can have no part in His kingdom, to take away nothing but the sins of the world. Therefore is it that out of this night "the morning cometh" and *must* come; the morning of a larger, clearer day of the cosmic week of human re-creation. And if our watchman adds—

"And also the night!" it is because he sees that, in the eternal rhythm of life, our every morning will needs be succeeded by its complemental night, wherein the works of the morning will be tried and tested, either as now—by war, or in some other crucible appropriate to the age; until at length is reached that last night of all, "the Night of Brahm," when the manifested universe with all its ingarnered works will sink into its Sabbath of rest in the incomprehensible Abyss of God and the incomparable splendour of that supreme darkness which is His Uncreated and Limitless Light.

Before that last night comes much remains to be perfected, much raising to be accomplished of what is now dead, much consciousness to be evolved and sublimated out of what is now refractory and torpid. The function of the moment and of the morning about to dawn is the purification and co-ordination under Christ of the divers kingdoms of this world—political, social, intellectual—preparatory to their synthetisation in that higher unity which we call the Kingdom of God. For the coming of this we may aspire, for the appearing of this we may watch; and in so doing perhaps shall see that that coming is accomplished already upon planes of life higher than ours, whence its issue into physical manifestation awaits only the due conditions for it which we ourselves must prepare. For no words of the Master are so well and closely wedded as those two, of which one bids us Watch! and the other promises, as the reward of our faithful watching, the vision of the immediate nearness of the Kingdom of God.